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**Levels and Agents, States and People:  
Micro-Historical Sociological Analysis and International Relations<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

The historical sociology of international relations is becoming an increasingly prominent field of enquiry. While advocates of an international historical sociology (IHS) have delivered a range of outstanding contributions, they have tended to revolve around the macro-scale, dealing with sweeping grand themes such as the nature of civilizations, the creation of world order, the advent of modernity, and the purpose and formation of the state. This article makes the case for incorporating micro-historical sociological analysis into IHS as a means of complementing already existing analyses, and providing a more rounded field of enquiry. The article argues that the micro–macro issue is an analytic strategy rather than an ontological choice, illustrating this point through a historical institutionalist variant of foreign policy analysis.

**Bringing the Micro Back In**

The relationship between historical sociology and International Relations (IR) is becoming an increasingly fruitful one, especially if we broaden the remit of what we can refer to as an 'international historical sociology' (IHS) to cover a broad range of social scientific investigations of the international which are carried out in an explicitly historical manner, particularly those focusing on the central dynamics of continuity and change over time. Works as varied as John Hobson's *Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, John Ikenberry's *After Victory*, Christian Reus-Smit's *Moral Purpose of the State*, and Justin Rosenberg's *Empire of Civil Society* all fit this broad remit (Hobson, 2004; Ikenberry, 2002; Reus-Smit, 1999; Rosenberg, 1994). All share a dedication to macro-historical analysis, which they have in common with most contemporary historical sociologists, especially those best known within IR, such as Michael Mann, Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly (Mann, 1986 and 1993;

Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1990). And all of these examples of IHS have sweeping grand themes concerning the nature of civilisations, the creation of world order, the advent of modernity, or the purpose and formation of the state.

These works ably demonstrate the value of an IHS approach: the combination of theoretical and historical (and sometimes comparative) analysis, and the ability to examine the production, reproduction and transformation of social forces and institutions over time. In essence, a generalised IHS approach involves using the methods of historical sociology to engage in comparative IR research, and the use of social theory as a framework for understanding historical phenomena. Historical sociology can be a boon to IR by both adding in grand forces of modernity developed in classical social theory, and by providing a richer approach to history not in terms of the provision of universal laws, but in unravelling the dynamic relationship between processes of continuity and change. These benefits derive more broadly from the classical tradition of sociology, and are at least compatible with the classical tradition of IR. As such, these perspectives tend to move away from the contemporary American mainstream of IR, though are not necessarily anathema to it.

But despite the many benefits that IHS offers, an under-examined deficiency of such analyses concerns its focus on large-scale patterns of change and continuity, and on grand historical structures. The result is a tendency to leave agency and micro-level processes out of its purview. As such, although macro-IHS remains central to the wider enterprise of historical sociology, it also generates certain dangers. As C. Wright Mills stated, ‘no social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society, has completed its intellectual journey’ (Mills, 1959, 12). As such, the question that this article addresses is whether there can be a micro-historical sociological approach to IR, one that concentrates on smaller scale contingencies occurring within the broader historical environment. Such analyses have had a place in the historical sociological tradition, and provide a useful complement to the current concentration on macro-analysis.

Taking the need for micro-analysis seriously means making a further argument – that the micro-macro split itself is really just a problem-oriented *analytic* division rather than an *ontological* commitment. Indeed, the importance of micro-analysis is precisely its linkage with macro-level forces. As such, there is no issue of micro *or* macro, but more a question of finding and using levels of analysis which are most appropriate for specific research questions. As Alexander and Giesen (1987, 1) state, ‘the micro-macro dichotomy should be viewed as an analytic distinction; all attempts to link it with concrete dichotomies—such as “individual versus society” or “action versus order”—are fundamentally misplaced. Only if it

is viewed analytically, moreover, can the linkage between micro and macro be achieved.’ Micro-macro approaches should be seen as complementary rather than conflicting, and the issues of linkages between them should always be kept alive.

IHS micro-analysis should be seen in a broader context of linkage: looking at small scale actions that happen within larger macro-contexts. Though this will be sketched out in greater detail below, micro-analysis can be easily encapsulated: examining how contingent actions on a micro-scale lead to important changes on the macro-scale, how such actions end up reproducing existing macro frameworks, or even the possibility that micro actions fall out of the remit of the macro. Incorporating micro-analysis in this way has several benefits: it can help to focus on smaller scale changes that impact on specific states, and on the international system as whole; and can bring back an often missing dimension of agency to macro-historical accounts of International Relations. The main limitation—especially clear in what is usually seen as the most macro of social science disciplines, IR—is that micro-analysis needs to reconnect with broader themes in order to avoid parochialism.

In what follows, the usefulness of such analysis will be demonstrated by making three moves. First, the nature of micro-analysis in IR will be discussed, relating it specifically to the levels of analysis debate, a useful starting point into thinking about this issue. Second, the link between macro and micro studies in social theory will be discussed in order to better illuminate how these two types of analysis are interrelated, and how both are necessary for the apposite study of social phenomena. Finally, an argument will be made that one of the most fruitful areas of analysis for a micro-HS study in IR will be in the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), albeit with some historical sociologically-oriented modifications.

### **Micro and Macro Theorising in IR: Levels and Agents**

While the ‘micro-macro’ problem has been well-covered in sociology, its place in the IR literature is more varied. While not necessarily precluding micro-level analysis, IR is in many ways the most macro-oriented discipline in the social sciences (Wight, 1998). The levels of analysis ‘problem’ is the main consideration of the issue within the discipline (Buzan, 1995; Onuf, 1998; Singer, 1961). The distinction between three, four or five levels of analysis – international system, subsystem (region), unit (state), bureaucracy and individual – has been one of the most influential ways of dividing up IR paradigms (Buzan, 1995; Hollis and Smith, 1990). The predominance of a debate between international system and unit (state) as

the key realms of explanation has especially been the case over the last forty years, encapsulated in the work of Waltz and Wendt on the one hand (Waltz, 1955; Waltz, 1979; Wendt, 1999; c.f. Carlsnaes, 2001), and proponents of forms of rational choice and game theory on the other (Fearon and Wendt, 2001; Kahler, 1998). Both stress the dominance of the international domain (i.e. between international system and states acting within that system), and the need to bracket off micro-level causes, especially the state level and below.<sup>2</sup> The validity of this move remains contested – those advocating a ‘neo-classical realism’ have, amongst others, noted a need for a return to analysing the state (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 1996). The analysis of events and action below the international level also live on in the strong, if hardly predominant, field of FPA (Carlsnaes, 2001).

However, the levels of analysis issue has its own problems. Although it serves the purpose of providing a way into the micro-macro debate in social theory, in terms of conceptualising levels as analytic domains it is very much susceptible to turning what is an analytic strategy into an ontological commitment. Rosenberg (1994), for instance, argues that the very framing of the levels of analysis problem leads to an either/or situation in terms of system-level or unit-level theorising. The problem is that IR tends to reify these levels instead of seeing them as complementary ways of looking at particular research problems. That is to say that once an appropriate level is chosen, all analysis of international outcomes become reducible to that level. Such an outcome may not be intended, but it ends up framing the levels of analysis problem in highly reductive terms, explicitly avoiding the important issue of linkage *between* levels (Buzan, 1995; Rosenberg, 1994; c.f. Goddard and Nexon, 2005). The possibility of re-conceptualising the levels of analysis problem in terms of micro-macro linkages is the subject of the next section.

A further problem which IR theorists face is the conflation of the levels of analysis problem with the issue of agency-structure (Wight, 1998). The conflation of the two is particularly clear in terms of conceptualising the state as an agent as opposed to the international system as a structure. For example, if the micro-macro issue mainly concerns a research strategy about small groups or individuals versus large structures, this is often reflected in IR through looking at the systemic level of the international in opposition to the micro realm of states as agents, or even at levels below the state. However, conflating the issue of analytic domains with the question of agency and structure ignores the existence of issues of structure and agency *at all* levels. As Carlsnaes points out, the agency-structure issue ‘is primarily concerned with the link between *purposive behaviour* ... and *social structures* on *any* level of analysis’ (Carlsnaes, 1992, 246). For example, micro-analysis

cannot be done without a conception of broader social structures in which micro-interaction occurs, just as macro-processes often concern these bigger structures themselves: as such, we can talk about ‘levels of structuration’ (Hay, 2002a; cf. Buzan, 1995; Hollis and Smith, 1990). The existence of multiple levels of structured interaction complicates the truncated IR view of the state as agent (Wight, 2004). The levels of analysis problem (as the IR version of the micro-macro problem) is clearly related to, though not reducible to, the issue of structure-agency. Overall, as Rosenberg notes, a social theory must show us ‘how the circumstances and pressures which confront us as checks to our *individual* agency are nonetheless simultaneously the ongoing historical product – or indeed *form* – of our *collective* agency’ (Rosenberg, 1994, 93).

The problem of the micro in IR is not restricted to either of these two confluences – the first in terms of the levels of analysis problem, and the second in terms of the dichotomy between agency and structure. There is also a larger issue of what actually constitutes micro-analysis in IR. Traditionally, micro-sociology and micro-history have been associated with small scale cases: looking at individual people, or at small groups of people (methods, however, here have differed, from those using highly interpretative methods such as ‘thick description’, to those using rational choice) (Tilly, 1988). In IR, it is not really clear what this could mean. Would micro-analysis be the study of the ‘agents’ of IR, such as states, or NGOs? If we follow the levels of analysis problem, it could easily refer to states as agents, or individuals within bureaucracies, in terms of how they interact to cause outcomes at the international level.

These problems all demonstrate clearly that the issue of micro-analysis has not been well dealt with in IR. The problematic manner in which purported levels of analysis become ontological suppositions, the conflating of the related but distinct issue of agency-structure with the choice of analytical levels, and the actual means of defining the micro itself, lead us back to the questions posed in the introduction. Can we find a way of incorporating a micro-analysis into IR, one that will also be part of IHS, and find an adequate way of understanding the linkage between both domains? A turn to debates in social theory should provide a preliminary way forward.

### **The Micro-Macro Link in Social Theory: Levels as Analytic Domains**

The micro-macro problem has long been a concern for social theorists (e.g. Layder, 1994), providing a question of which level of the social world researchers should be examining – structures or people. An example can be seen in Marx's often cited comment that 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx, 1978a, 595). The differentiation of a level of social action and broader social structure is key to this statement. As such, Marx hooks into a number of key dichotomies in social theory, such as agency-structure, individual-society, and action-order. However, it is important to keep these different dichotomies analytically distinct, as they all perform different functions in social theorising. The key to understanding the micro-macro issue is two-fold: first understanding it as a methodological question concerning appropriate 'levels of analysis', and second in conceptualising an adequate link between the micro and the macro.

Just looking at two central social theorists, Marx and Weber, we can see some of the issues the micro and the macro create, especially in terms of conceptualising linkage. While Marx is seen as the exemplar macro-theorist, his focus on the macro level of analysis was never meant to exclude the micro. As Marx wrote in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, 'Social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice' (Marx, 1978b, 145). A focus on human action played an important role in Marx's theorising. Similarly, Weber also honed in on human action as being crucial to social theory, although he attempted to form a synthesis of these two levels of analysis (Weber, 1946, 1976). Weber has one of the most interesting of such syntheses, in which a theory of action is connected to broader ideas about order. Weber's theorising 'moves back and forth, naturally and fluidly, between the macroanalysis of ideational complexes and institutional systems and the microanalysis of how individuals within such situations make interpretations and purposefully act' (Alexander and Geisen, 1987, 16). The importance of the micro level overall is quite telling, even though both of these theorists, despite their proclivities, in the end (albeit in their own very distinct ways) opt for macro-analysis. The role of the micro and macro in these two theorists helps to move the micro-macro dichotomy away from other important dichotomies, especially that of agency versus structure, in order to get understand something of primary importance: that micro and macro are really just analytic distinctions – as such both are required in social research.

In historical sociology, there has long been a proclivity for the macro scale. That this is so is rather unsurprising. In attempting to examine social phenomena in time, there is a tendency to look towards the large-scale, as looking at smaller contexts and phenomena leads one inevitably into the arena of history, or to an isolated case study. The move towards macro-sociology was precisely intended to arrest a sociological pre-occupation with the present and with the unchanging (Tilly, 1988). Looking at isolated, small-scale history may not really help to change such perspectives.

However, the move towards macro-historical analysis was not the only path along which historical sociology could have taken. As Tilly has pointed out, ‘the turn to history could have processed at any of four levels, meta-historical, world-systemic, macrohistorical, or microhistorical’ (Tilly, 1988, 706). The microhistorical, for Tilly, involves ‘studying the experiences of individuals and well-defined groups within the limits set by large-scale structures and processes’ (Tilly, 1988, 706). As such, historical sociology need not be confined to macro-analysis, despite the way in which it has been imported into IR. As Abrams has pointed out, historical sociology ‘is the attempt to understand the relationship of personal activity and experience on the one hand, and social organisation on the other, as something that is continuously constructed in time’ (quoted in Tilly, 1988, 711). If we accept such a definition, then it should be seen that historical analysis in the social sciences needs *both* kinds of analysis. In fact, and as is explicit in Tilly’s statement above, the linkage between the micro and macro scales is a crucial part of the analysis itself, and the domains are not ontologically discrete.

While a number of theorists and practitioners within historical sociology have articulated compelling reasons for the inclusion of micro-historical studies, they have not been at the forefront of historical sociology in political science, or of the major sociological studies that most in IR are familiar with (see e.g. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003). This is partially to do with the perceived nature of the methodology of micro-historical and micro-sociological studies. Drawing on what Collins (1994: chap. 4) describes as the ‘microinteractionist’ strand of sociology, as well as other forms of interpretive methods, micro-history has tended to contrast with the more causally oriented macro-historical sociology that dominates political science (Walton, 2003). While the contrast between the two methodologies is important, it is not clear that micro-level studies have to be dominated by interpretive methodologies. For one, micro-theories have also been attractive to those stressing positivist methodologies, as is certainly seen by those advocating rational choice approaches, even within historical sociology (Kiser and Hector, 1998; Levi, 1988; c.f. Somers, 1998). Additionally, it is surely



plausible and possible to examine the role of causal mechanisms at the micro-level (Tilly, 2001; c.f. Carlsnaes, 1992). As such, the debate on methodology tells us little about the exclusion of the micro-level.

The articulation of a micro alternative within historical sociology leads back to the vexing question of defining the micro. Layder provides a useful starting point: the micro-macro distinction ‘distinguishes between a primary concentration on the analysis of face-to-face conduct (everyday activities, the routines of social life), as against a primary concentration on the larger scale, more impersonal macro phenomena like institutions and the distributions of power and resources’ (Layder, 1994, 5). While this is a useful definition, the emphasis on the micro as equivalent to face-to-face interaction, the day-to-day, too easily slips into the idea that individuals are the main focus of micro-analysis. We need to move away from conceptualising micro and macro with pre-specified empirical referents. The micro-macro distinction should rather be seen as analytic contrasts, that are formed in the context of empirical analysis; as Lemert states, ‘they are analytic contrasts, suggesting emergent levels within empirical units, not antagonistic empirical units themselves’ (cited in Peltonen, 2001, 357). If we follow Peltonen’s suggestion that the micro needs to have both a temporal and spatial dimension, we can see that the smaller scale can have a variety of referent points, that do not necessarily just have to be individuals (Peltonen, 2001). This is especially true of institutional analysis, which, if we are using a broad definition of institutions, may be seen as providing social contexts at a micro level that do not have immediate connections to the macro. As such, micro-analysis should not be restricted to the analysis of individuals.

More problematic than defining the content of the micro (and macro) is the conception of linkage with the macro. The need for some sort of linkage is quite obvious, as was seen in the work of Marx and Weber, and is certainly the case in IR. However, the issue of linkage is at the heart of most conceptions of social theory, and is where micro-macro begins to most resemble agency-structure, as it starts to move towards providing an account of social ontology. However, these two issues should be kept distinct. That is because the agency-structure debate is largely an ontological issue, one that involves degrees of voluntarism and structuralism in the social world, a matter that cannot be resolved empirically (Hay, 2002b).

The micro-macro debate, while overlapping in terms of the macro tending towards issues of broad social structures, the micro towards agents, is a broader analytic distinction. Whereas agency-structure exists and is necessarily analysed at both the micro and macro levels (Carlsnaes, 1992; Hay, 2002a), the micro-macro are really to do with differences in the ‘level and scale of analysis’ (Layder, 1994, 5). Even with a position taken on agency-

structure, the analytic question of where to look for a particular research question is not necessarily resolved. As such, the issue of micro and macro in social analysis has to do with broader questions of scale of analysis, an issue that links into particular research questions, and cannot really be decided beforehand. The issue of micro and macro therefore concerns an analytic issue, about appropriateness. For example, even for someone who takes the position that ‘rational, purposeful individuals acquiesce to society because they are forced to by external, social control’ (Alexander and Giesen 1997, 14), the importance of micro-analysis may be demonstrated in empirical terms, where analysing micro-networks of individuals and how they are ‘coerced’ by social structures will be of extreme importance.

Overall, the micro should be understood as a necessary linkage to macro investigations. As Peltonen has suggested, it is not necessarily that micro studies need look at a specific kind of actor or case, but it is more about the interrelation between the micro and macro (Peltonen, 2001). As he states, ‘in the new microhistory the link between micro and macro is not a simple reduction or aggregation. The movement from one level or sphere to another is qualitative, and generates new information’ (Peltonen, 2001, 357). As such, micro-analysis has the potential to not only complement macro-analysis, but to provide new articulations of the link between macro and micro phenomena, and potentially to point out problems with aggregation that are inherent in macro-analyses.

### **IHS Micro-Analysis: Foreign Policy Making and Beyond**

Mapping the previous argument back onto IR, it is clear that there is no *theoretical* need to choose a ‘level’ of analysis (i.e. between micro and macro)— this is better seen as an *analytic* strategy determined by research questions (see also Buzan 1995). Though the issue of linkage moves the debate on somewhat by asking how levels relate to each other, there is no need for IR to focus exclusively on theorising at one level. What is clear is that the levels of analysis issue, as one attempt within IR to deal with the micro-macro split, should be done away with. This is because it fails overall in being a useful analytic device, and becomes a way of determining empirical referents prior to analysis. Micro-analysis does not have to be foreign to either International Relations or historical sociology, and especially not IHS. But especially apparent is the need for a specification of linkage between micro and macro, both theoretically and empirically, in order to remain committed to the need for both micro and macro as crucial domains of analysis.

With the micro-macro problem put back in an IR context, what kinds of solutions could be found from IHS? One of the early promises of IHS was to bridge the domestic-international divide, though this was meant in rather broad terms (Halliday, 1988; Hobson, 1998; c.f. Gourevitch, 1978; Katzenstein, 1976). As Hobson puts it, we need a ‘thick conception of the state-society complex, which implies that international and domestic structures are co-constituted and are fundamentally embedded within a series of social relationships’ (Hobson, 2002, 21). If we take the interaction between these ‘levels’ seriously, we can demonstrate interaction between the international system and broader macro-structures, and the realm of micro-contexts of social action within states themselves, especially within the institutional contexts that have major impacts on foreign policy outcomes. Additionally, conceptualising levels in this manner also provides a more coherent account of agency, moving beyond the state-as-agent assumption made by the majority of IR scholars. As Jessop has argued, ‘it is not the state which acts: it is always specific sets of politicians and state officials located in specific parts of the state system’ (quoted in Wight, 1999, 127). Seeing state agency as mediated by institutional constraints within the state itself, which set the context for actors within the state, but is not determined by them alone, is a crucial addition that a micro-oriented IHS can provide.

The comparative historical study of foreign policy institutions provides one reasonable area where a micro-IHS analysis could become fruitful.<sup>3</sup> As pointed out above, the study of foreign policy tends to be one place where varieties of micro-analysis are commonplace, though they tend to be more focused on the process of policy-making, or the micro-processes that set the decision-making context. A micro-IHS analysis would add to this in three ways: first, analysing the development and impact of institutions in foreign policy making; second, by emphasising the importance of time in this analysis; and finally by reinstating the micro-macro link, by empirically examining the linkage between actors, microstructures, institutions and the broader macro-context. FPA has one of the strongest traditions of incorporating forms of micro-analysis into the study of IR. The combination of looking at groups of individuals in their places in a policy-making context sets the ground for rather rich micro-studies. However, much FPA has lacked a connection to the tools of historical sociology.

Valerie Hudson’s recent overview of American FPA provides an excellent way in to these issues. From the outset, Hudson argues that FPA should provide a ‘ground’ for IR theorising more generally, in that ‘all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in *human decision makers acting singly or in groups*’ (Hudson, 2005, 1). The neglected ‘black

boxes' of systemic IR theory can be better understood, and indeed need to be better understood through a greater focus on action-oriented theory. Hudson further paints the picture for theorising more severely, as an actorless theory will not be able to better comprehend many important aspects of international relations itself: 'if our IR theories contain no human beings, they will erroneously paint for us a world of no change, no creativity, no persuasion, no accountability' (Hudson, 2005, 3). On these grounds, Hudson advocates the promotion of FPA, focused on decision-making processes and qualitative methods, in order to better conceptualise agency in IR.

The field of FPA has some important dimensions to add to a micro-analysis of IR. However, it is still lacking somewhat in terms of providing a micro model for IHS. First, the biggest drawback to the FPA school, especially in its American guise, is the commitment to agency-centred explanations for foreign-policy decision making. This is problematic on a number of levels, but most importantly in that it tends to ignore broader structural features, especially in terms of making the crucial linkage between micro and macro-contexts. As Christopher Hill has pointed out, 'we can only fully understand what states do by looking at two interactions: between their international position and their domestic context; and between the problem being faced and the nature of the decision-making process employed to handle it' (Hill, 2002, 52).

In this vein, Hill criticizes the bureaucratic politics model ('where you stand depends on where you sit') (Allison, 1971) on similar grounds, but which emanate from the micro-context. For Hill the bureaucratic politics model is analytically deficient: it either replicates the rational actor model on a sub-state unit level; or has a very restrictive idea of organizational socialisation, which is basically descriptive (Hill, 2002, 87-88). Drawing on Hollis and Smith's critique, Hill argues that 'Bureaucratic animals are constrained by their terms of reference, their superiors and the culture (or "expectations") of their group, and they also have opportunities to interpret their given roles in new ways on the basis of their own personalities and particular circumstances' (Hill, 2002, 89).

The second downside is the lack of systemic institutionalist theorising in FPA. Zegart has noted that existing FPA approaches towards bureaucracies (specifically the bureaucratic politics approach) tend to avoid looking at origins, and are extremely inductive, looking at specific historical instances with little consideration of the origins and evolution of bureaucracies (Zegart, 1999: 20-21). Allison's (1971) organizational process model comes closest to providing an institutionalist framework, highlighting how the structures of standard operating procedures within bureaucracies can impinge on decision-making and especially

policy implementation. However, it goes too far in structural terms to denying agency, especially regarding how such organizational routines are often broken. As Welch points out, the existing facts on the Cuban missile crisis demonstrates ‘that existing organizational routines neither exhaust the range of available options, nor resist change, nor necessarily determine the course of implementation, nor systematically induce instrumental irrationalities in state behaviour’ (Welch, 1992, 122-123).

Furthermore, FPA has long been overly focused on bureaucracies themselves, and not the broader macro-contexts that they are submerged in. As Krasner has argued, the bureaucratic politics model looks too closely at the workings of the bureaucratic ‘machine’, and avoids broader questions of ideology. As he comments regarding US foreign policy making during the Vietnam war, according to proponents of the bureaucratic politics paradigm, ‘the machine and not the cold war ideology and the hubris of the Kennedy and Johnson determined American behaviour in Vietnam’ (Krasner, 1972, 162). Making the bridge back from the micro to macro is of crucial importance, even if the conclusion is that there is little impact in either direction. For example, another counter-argument lodged against Allison’s bureaucratic politics model ‘maintains that however much departmental in-fighting distorts policy, its basic thrust is provided by the deeper structure of society and its ideology’ (Hill and Light, 1985, 160). The agency-centred approaches also have this drawback. As Rosenberg broadly notes, agency, ‘no longer visible as the basic fabric of the social world, it appears now for the most part in the bureaucratic decision-making of statesmen’ (Rosenberg, 1994, 95).

Finally, the question of historical process looms large, especially in terms of the historical development and reproduction of foreign policy institutions and the role of contingency in historical development. Zegart (1999) has directed much forceful criticism towards FPA scholars regarding the issue of history, as was mentioned above. If we combine Zegart’s critique of ignoring the origins of bureaucracies and the problem of induction with the lack of systemic institutionalist analysis, there is a real gap that can be filled by a specifically *historical* institutionalist analysis of FPA.<sup>4</sup> A more adequate historical intuitionist argument would recognise the importance of contingency in institutional creation. As March and Olson state, ‘programs adopted as a simple political compromise by a legislature become endowed with separate meaning and form by having an agency established to deal with them’ (March and Olson, 1984, 749). One highlight of this recognition is the move away from seeing institutions in functionalist terms. It can also recognize the importance of institutional creations as path dependent processes: small contingencies have broader consequences, that

are also hard to reverse to the extent to which institutions have increasing returns over time (Pierson, 2000; c.f. Mahoney, 2000). Overall, a historical institutionalist analysis of FPA would help to draw in all of the necessary elements of a micro-IHS.

To use an important example, the development of a ‘national security state’ in the US after World War II, we can see how all of these elements come into play in a specifically historical institutionalist look at the development of US foreign policy. Halliday, in his initial intervention at to the possibilities of historical sociology in IR used this very example to illustrate the importance of internal bureaucratic change in terms of its impacts on foreign policy, and on broader macro-structures of world politics:

The influence on the US state of its post-1945 adoption of a global role has been much commented upon and has left some liberal critics to talk of a ‘national security state’ in the US. The enhanced power of the President, the ebb and flow of Congressional controls, the rise of new bureaucracies with international functions (CIA, NSC), and the changed character of the State Department are all instances of this impact of the international realm on the domestic (Halliday, 1988, 222).

Such a description could be easily extended to provide historical institutionalist analyses of the micro levels of international relations.

Looking more specifically at the origins and reproduction of new institutions ‘with international functions’ provides a more micro-oriented analysis, looking at the roles of individuals and groups individuals, working within a broader historical context. With the development of a more centralised and coordinated security apparatus at the onset of the Cold War, the US state went through fundamental changes that not only affected the way it formulated and implemented policy, but through its relative level of international strength, also had a heavy impact on international relations more generally. That the creation of the institutions involved was not done in an instrumental manner makes the analysis of their creation even more important to explain.

We can look at the matter of institutional origins on two levels. First, Zegart (1999) makes a strong ‘new institutionalist’ case for origins in terms of domestic political processes, pointing very much to the real compromise position that the 1947 National Security Act—which created the National Security Council (NSC), Department of Defense and CIA—really was (c.f. Caraley, 1966; Hammond, 1977). Her argument is that international relations generally has little to do with institutional creation. However, Zegart does concede that in exceptional circumstances, international events may precipitate the creation of new foreign policy institutions: ‘domestic and international political developments serve as external

shocks that can entrench an agency in its current developmental path, or, in rare instances, shift it to a new one' (Zegart, 1999, 43). As much was certainly the case in the examples she discusses, all part of the 1947 National Security Act. The Congressional debates surrounding the Act often had supporters using the attack on Pearl Harbor as a reference point. As Hogan points out, "'Remember Pearl Harbor!'" was a favorite refrain, because that disaster had underscored the need for better intelligence, for teamwork between the services, and for permanent preparedness' (Hogan, 1998, 60). So a second element of causation is also present in the degree to which 'external' events have impacts on institutional origins.

Setting the broader macro-context for the development of such institutions is also possible by drawing on the rich accounts of the development of threat in the early Cold War period (e.g. Gaddis, 1987, 2004; Leffler, 1982), and furthered by drawing on accounts that link the foreign policy establishment with broader societal trends. Since, as Rosenberg points out, 'most IR theory treats the social content of the Cold War as mere background noise to the operative logic of power politics' (Rosenberg, 1994, 103-104), it is of crucial importance to draw on broader macro-contexts that also play a vital casual role in the development of institutions. Drawing on the work of diplomatic historians who map out this broader terrain would be one way of dealing with this problem: important examples include Hogan's reconstruction of the development of the US national security state after World War II (Hogan, 1998) and Cumings' analysis of the origins of the Korean War (Cumings, 1981 and 1992; c.f. Cumings, 1993). The combination of the more agent-centred approach looking at institutional origins as a domestic political process, combined with attention to the macro-context allows for a much richer examination of institutional development.

Looking more intently at the reproduction and development of institutions over time is also crucial. In the US, the post-World War II creation of stronger institutions for military-civilian coordination, as seen in the example of the NSC, set the stage for an increased emphasis on military security; as May argues, 'the main business of the U.S. government had become the development, maintenance, position, exploitation and regulation of military forces' (May, 1992, 227). The creation of new security bureaucracies, and the militarisation that they allowed for, led to a particular version of US government, that as May points out, the Cold War effectively created. As Jablonsky describes it: 'this expansive concept of US national security led increasingly to the dominance of military-security concerns and a transcendent military establishment' (Jablonsky, 2002-2003, 5). Such a vision recalled President Truman's initial desire, that 'our military policy, for example, should be completely consistent with our foreign policy.' Overall, Truman envisaged a 'total security program' that

not only unified civilian and military management, but also supported the military through economic and scientific planning during peacetime (Truman, 1945).

These institutions thus sedimented a particular version of security, that was based on a complex mix of discourses about the nature of the security environment after World War II, and easily transposed to the Soviet Union as a threat. Overall, the civilian-military synthesis, while not quite leading to the military dominated ‘garrison state’ that many critics had feared (Friedberg, 2000), it did lead to a more militarised version of US government (Hogan, 1998; Jablonsky, 2002-2003). The very fact that the new security bureaucracies became the paramount positions of power in Washington showed this increasing role in restructuring US government. The security bureaucracy grew dramatically in size: the NSC got its own building which used to house the Army, Navy and State Departments; the State Department received its own building; and the armed services had the Pentagon (May, 1992: 217-218). Hogan also points out the expanded bureaucracies led to a new type of government employee: non-elected security experts (Hogan, 1998: 5). The creation of new institutions entrenches them in the system – while they can be created by external events, their actual creation is often not ideal, and the actual creation also leaves ‘birthmarks’ that are hard to remove: ‘basic features of institutional design . . . provide the roadways for future agency development’ (Zegart, 1999: 43). As such, the development of these security institutions within the US post-World War II had profound effects on the nature of the state, and their robustness over time, due to a combination of perceived success and path dependence, has taken the US down one particular pathway that is now rather firmly entrenched.

The example of the ‘national security state’ shows how rich an account of FPA can be when combined with the tools of historical sociology. While the example above was only a rough sketch showing what is possible, it provides an interesting towards a micro-oriented IHS. Such an orientation would do much to draw IR as a social science back to Mills’ claim, set out in the introduction, drawing together the threads of biography, history, and social structure.

### **Towards a Micro International Historical Sociology**

The nature of the levels of analysis debate in IR leads to problems when thinking about incorporating micro levels of analysis into IR in a better fashion. Because of the perceived need to definitively ‘choose a level’, or to perpetually defer the matter of linkage between



levels, the levels of analysis issue has become too stultified to serve its actual purpose – as a guide for research. Looking at the way in which the debate has been shaped in social theory clarifies these matters somewhat, and brings us back to two important ideas: looking at micro-macro as an analytic strategy which is a broader category than agency-structure (while maintaining important links to it); and affirming and emphasising the importance of linkages between levels for a comprehensive analysis of International Relations.

The purpose of this article is not just to affirm these positions, but to bring these issues to bear on the use of micro-level theorising in international historical sociology. Historical sociology was never necessarily exclusively a macro-oriented approach, and without more attention to micro-analysis, international historical sociology is sustaining a selection bias which factors some questions in, and leaves others, which should be central to its remit, both unheard and unanswered. A historical-institutionalist approach to foreign policy analysis is one possibility for engaging better with micro positions, one which incorporates both historical sensitivity and the possibility of assessing linkages between analytic levels. A micro-IHS can also help to reconnect theorising the international with history and agency. For example, a micro-IHS can show how institutions within states are shaped by external structural contexts, and how this limits the scope of individual action.

A micro-IHS also brings a more complex idea of agency back into International Relations. We should not forget that social analysis, in addition to being historical, must pay attention to social action in terms of relations between individuals. As Rosenberg points out, ‘this does not mean it downgrades the importance of institutional forms such as the state and the market. On the contrary, it tries to read in these phenomena the play of individual and collective agency constituted in a particular form’ (Rosenberg, 1994, 104). As such, the turn to history in IR needs to be complemented with a recognition and commitment to looking at society as a whole, and not engage in the reification of levels. Taken together, the promise of micro-analysis both to the sub-discipline of international historical sociology and to IR as a broader enterprise is extremely rich.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the rational choice tradition in IR is a ‘micro’-oriented approach in terms of its commitment to the analysis of micro-foundations, which have macro-consequences (Fearon and Wendt, 2001; Kahler, 1998; c.f. Schelling, 1978). However, this is mainly about *states* as rational actors, and not about sub-state micro-foundations.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Seabrooke’s work on IPE shows another road that micro-analysis can take within IHS (Seabrooke, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> For more on historical institutionalism, see Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) and Thelen (2003).